

South Central District - Interstate 80 Lakes

Fish Survey Results - Spring 2010

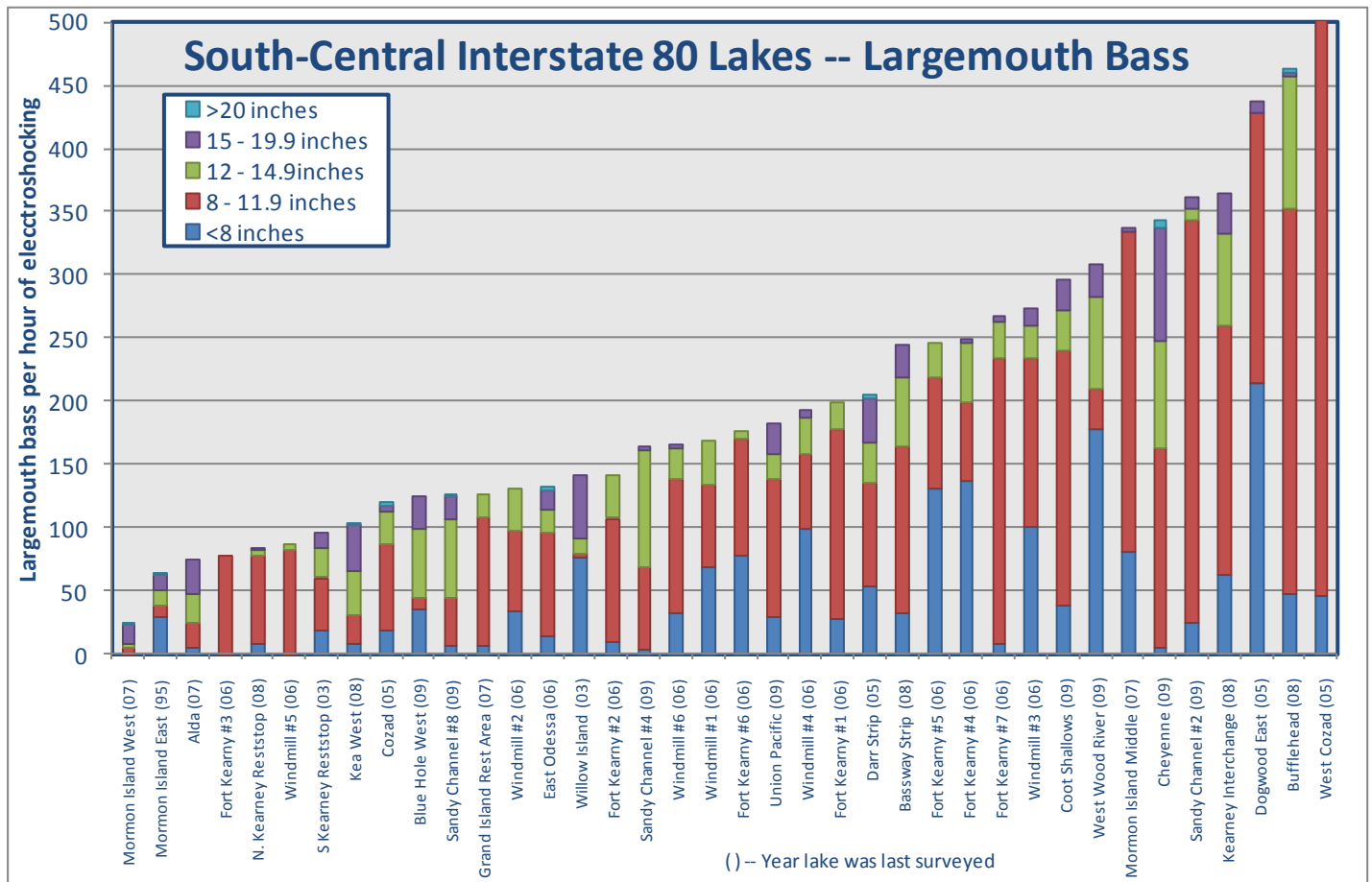


Brad Eifert, Fisheries Biologist

Spanning a stretch of 150 miles along Interstate 80 from Grand Island to Hershey, there are 58 small lakes available for public fishing. South Central District Fisheries staff has management responsibility on approximately 44 of these lakes from Grand Island to Gothenburg. These man-made lakes, most of which were created for fill material when the Interstate system was developed in the 1960's, range in size from 1 to 40 acres. These sandy bottom lakes have excellent shoreline access for anglers and usually contain clear water and abundant aquatic vegetation, which provides excellent habitat conditions for largemouth bass and bluegill. In addition to these two species, most of the lakes contain channel catfish, while others have crappie, rock bass, walleye, and northern pike. Most of these lakes are surveyed on a five year rotation and the following graphs and text display these results.

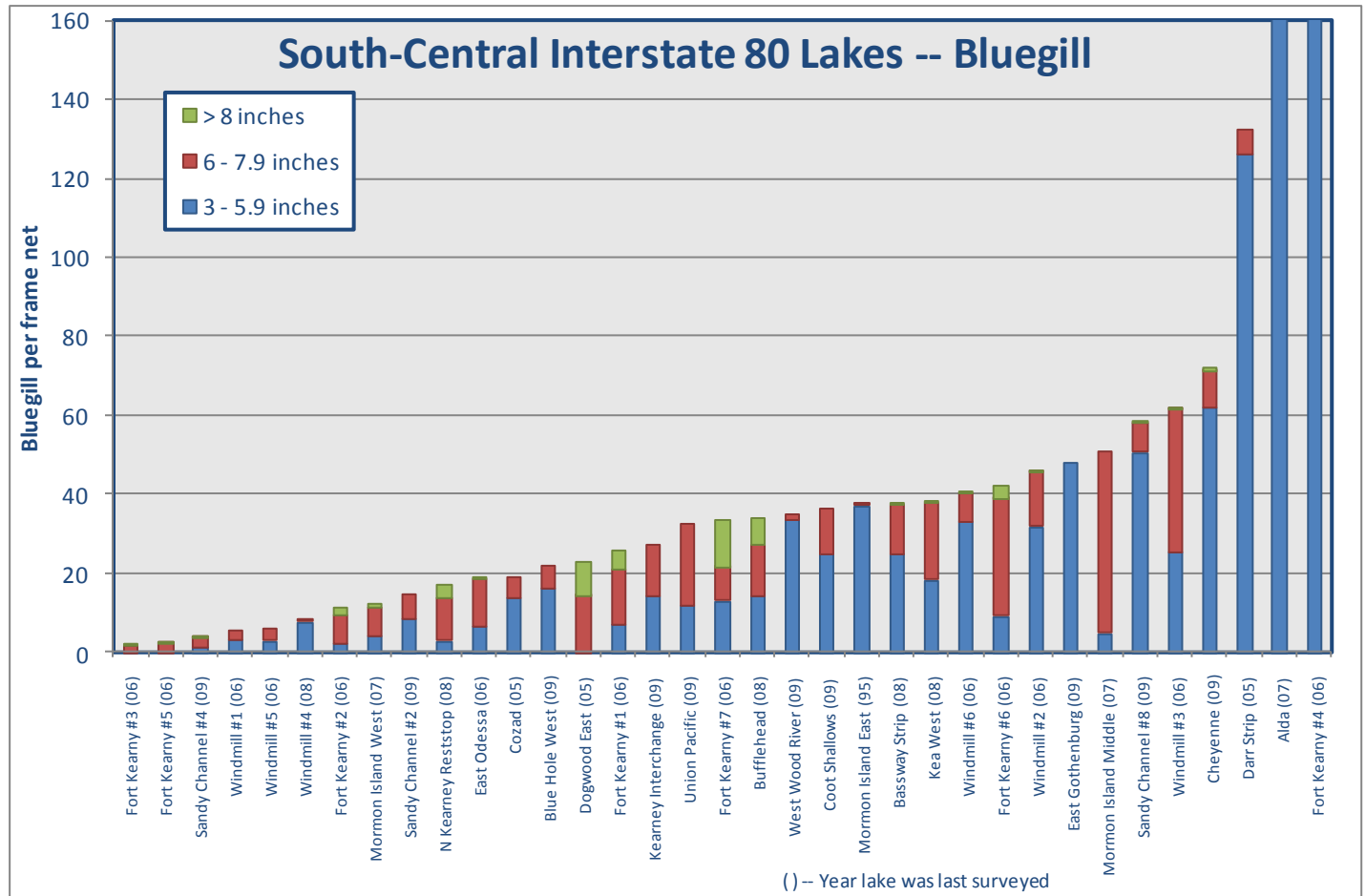
Largemouth Bass

Largemouth bass are present in all of the Interstate lakes in the South Central District, except for War Axe SRA which has smallmouth bass. Lakes with high densities of bass, where you could expect high catch rates, include the Windmill and Ft. Kearny Lakes, as well as Middle Mormon Island, Kearney Interchange, North Kearney Reststop, Coot Shallows, Sandy Channel #2, Dogwood East, and West Cozad. Lakes that traditionally produce larger bass include Cheyenne, Bufflehead, Blue Hole West, Sandy Channel #8, Willow Island, and Darr. Most of the I-80 lakes within the South Central District have a 15-inch minimum size limit on largemouth bass. Exceptions to this include Cheyenne and West Wood River, which both have a no harvest regulation for bass. The Mormon Island SRA Lakes and War Axe both have a 21-inch minimum length limit. Anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release on bass in the I-80 Lakes as they are easily over-harvested in these small lakes.



Bluegill

Bluegill are present in almost all of the I-80 lakes within the South Central District. While most of the lakes can be good places to catch bluegill, some of the best lakes to catch six to eight inch bluegill include Mormon Island Middle, Windmill SRA, Fort Kearny SRA, Kea West, North Kearney Reststop, Cozad, and West Cozad. Big bluegills, greater than eight inches, can be found in many of the lakes but they are not usually very abundant and their presence doesn't always last long once anglers find them. Some lakes that consistently produce larger bluegill include Bassway Strip, Bufflehead, Kearney Interchange, Sandy Channel #8, Dogwood East, Windmill #2 and Ft. Kearny #7. Special regulations on bluegill for Interstate lakes include a daily bag limit of 10-panfish at Mormon Island, Windmill and Ft. Kearney SRA's.



Other Fish Species

Channel Catfish

Channel catfish are stocked in most of the Interstate Lakes on an alternate year basis. Windmill #4 and Fort Kearny #6 both have intensive catfish stocking and feeding programs, which increases abundance, average size and catchability of the catfish in those lakes. Other lakes with good potential for catfish include: Mormon Island West, West Wood River, Bufflehead, Kearney Interchange, Fort Kearny #2, Coot Shallows, Blue Hole West, Sandy Channel #1 & #8, and Darr. The daily bag limit for channel catfish on the Interstate 80 Lakes east of Gothenburg is three catfish per day. In addition, Fort Kearny #2 and Windmill #3 have been designated as catch and release only lakes for channel catfish. Additional information regarding these regulations can be found in the current online fishing guide at: <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/fishing/guides/fishguide/FishGuide.pdf>



Common carp

Often thought of as a rough fish, the common carp can provide anglers and archers excellent fishing opportunities in many of the Interstate 80 lakes. Trophy-sized common carp (15-25 pounds) can be found in low abundance at Bassway Strip, Bufflehead, Kea West, and Sandy Channel #4 & #8. More numerous, albeit smaller carp can be caught at Mormon Island West, Cheyenne, West Wood River, Blue Hole West, Sandy Channel #1, and Willow Island.



Other Fish Species (continued)

Crappie

Crappie are found in many of the Interstate Lakes, but generally are in fairly low abundance. Lakes with the highest densities of crappie include: Mormon Island West, Mormon Island Middle, Cheyenne, West Wood River, Windmill Lakes 1, 2, 3, and 4, Ft. Kearny #2, Kearney Interchange, Kea West, Coot Shallows, Blue Hole West, Cozad and East Gothenburg.



Northern Pike

Northern pike are currently stocked in Alda Lake to provide extra predation on abundant panfish populations and provide anglers a local pike fishery. Pike were first stocked in 2002, with additional stockings occurring in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2009. Good numbers of pike up to 36 inches should be present in catchable numbers. There is a 30-inch minimum length limit in effect for pike at this lake and anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release.



Rainbow Trout

Anglers also have the opportunity to catch rainbow trout during the fall, winter and early spring months at Windmill Lake #1. This lake is annually stocked with 6,000 10-inch rainbows to provide anglers a unique opportunity to catch trout in central Nebraska. The trout do not survive the warm summer months so angling for them ends in May. The daily bag limit is eight trout per day.



Redear Sunfish

Redear sunfish have been introduced into several Interstate 80 Lakes during the past several years. Redear, or shellcrackers as they are commonly referred to in the South, have a preference for eating snails, and require clear water and abundant vegetation. This type of habitat is common in many of the Interstate Lakes and allows redear to survive outside of their native range. Waters where you can currently find redear sunfish include Mormon Island Middle, War Axe, South Kearney Rest Stop, West Cozad and East Gothenburg.



Rock Bass

Rock bass are rare in most parts of Nebraska, but can be found in several of the Interstate Lakes. Some lakes with fishable rock bass populations include: Bufflehead, Kea West, Union Pacific, Sandy Channel #8, Dogwood East, Darr, Cozad and West Cozad. Rock bass can also be found in low densities in some of the lakes at Windmill SRA.



Smallmouth Bass

Smallmouth bass were introduced into War Axe in the fall of 2007, following the chemical renovation of the lake, to provide anglers another unique fishing opportunity. Historically, smallmouth bass were stocked in many Interstate 80 Lakes following their completion in the 1970's. While smallmouth thrived in these lakes, over time they have been mostly displaced by largemouth bass. There is a 21-inch minimum size limit on smallmouth bass at War Axe.



Walleye/Sauger

Although normally known as a large lake or reservoir fish, walleye and sauger can be caught in some of the Interstate Lakes. Walleye are currently stocked in Sandy Channel #8 and have previously been stocked in Mormon Island West to provide an additional predator species and to provide angling opportunities for anglers who cannot fish the large reservoirs where walleye are normally caught. Sauger have been stocked at Blue Hole West for several years and it currently has a fair population of fish up to 20 inches. There is a 15-inch minimum size limit on walleye and sauger in effect for all of the Interstate Lakes.



Wipers

A wiper stocking and feeding program was implemented at Windmill #3 and Ft. Kearny #4 from 2003-2008 to provide anglers the chance to catch large wipers. Due to several factors, the program was terminated in 2009 and the 18-inch minimum size limit and one fish daily bag limit has been rescinded. Fort Kearny #4 still contains fair numbers of wipers ranging from 18 to 24 inches, and should provide good angling opportunities for another couple years.



Other Species (continued)

Yellow Perch

Normally thought of as a species found only in more northern latitudes, yellow perch can be caught in some of the Interstate 80 lakes. Advanced fingerling perch are currently stocked at Windmill #2, Fort Kearny #5, Sandy Channel #8 and Cozad. Perch can also be caught at Windmill #5, Bufflehead, and Kea West.



Angler Access/Boat Ramps

Shoreline access for anglers at the Interstate Lakes is generally very good, but is best at Mormon Island, Cheyenne, War Axe, Windmill, Ft. Kearny, Sandy Channel and Union Pacific. Handicapped accessible fishing piers are also available at Mormon Island West, Windmill #2, Fort Kearny #6 and Fort Kearny #7.

For anglers preferring to fish from a boat, improved concrete boat ramps are available at Bassway Strip (West Lake), Bufflehead, Kearney Interchange, Coot Shallows, Sandy Channel (Lake #8), Dogwood East, Cozad and East Gothenburg. All types of boats are allowed on these eight lakes, but a 5 mph/no wake rule is enforced. Improved gravel ramps are available at Cheyenne, War Axe, Kea West, Union Pacific and West Blue Hole. West Blue Hole has a 5 mph/no wake rule, while Cheyenne, War Axe, Union Pacific and Kea West are electric motors only. The remainder of the Interstate lakes allow either electric motors only or no boats, so please refer to the boating guide for additional information on these lakes:

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/boating/pdfs/boatguide.pdf>



Mormon Island Fishing Pier



Bufflehead Boat Ramp



Bassway Strip Boat Ramp

Interstate 80 Lakes — Additional Information

Renovations

No Interstate 80 Lakes in the South Central District were chemically renovated during 2009. Mormon Island West is scheduled for renovation during the late summer of 2010. It currently has a high abundance of common carp and gizzard shad which are having detrimental impacts on the quality of aquatic habitat and sportfish populations.

Regulations

There were no regulation changes pertaining to any of the Interstate 80 Lakes located within the boundaries of the South Central District for the 2010 fishing season. For a complete listing of all the fishing regulations please see the current 2010 fishing guide available at Game and Parks Offices and from vendors who issue permits.

The guide can also be viewed online at:

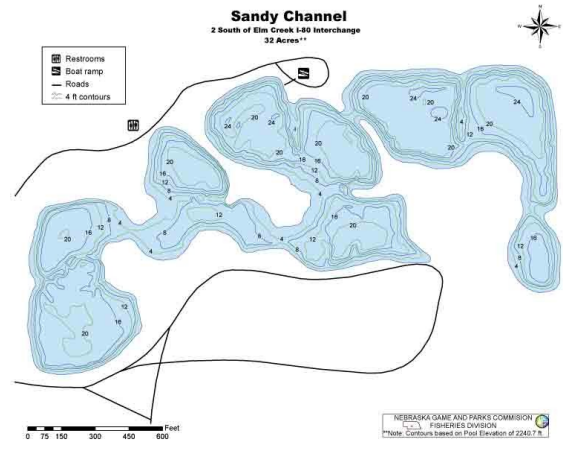
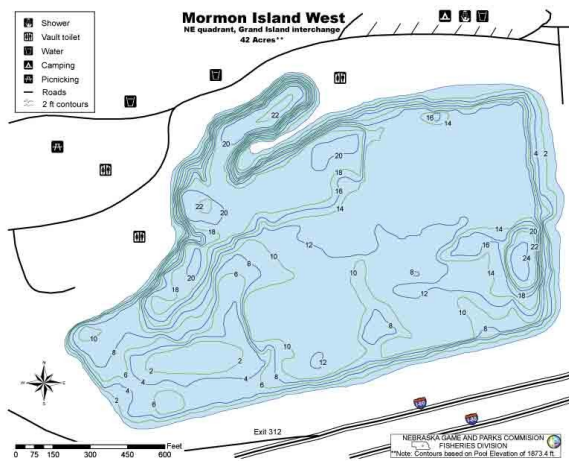
<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/fishing/guides/fishguide/FishGuide.pdf>



Lake Maps

Several of the Interstate Lakes have been surveyed by the Fisheries Division lake mapping crew and detailed bathymetric maps are available on the Game and Parks web page. These maps, as well as other lake maps can be viewed at:

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/fishing/programs/lakemapping/lakemapping.asp>

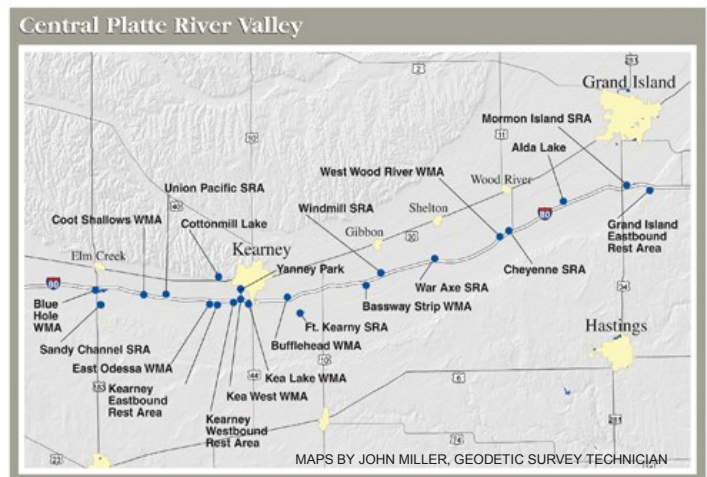
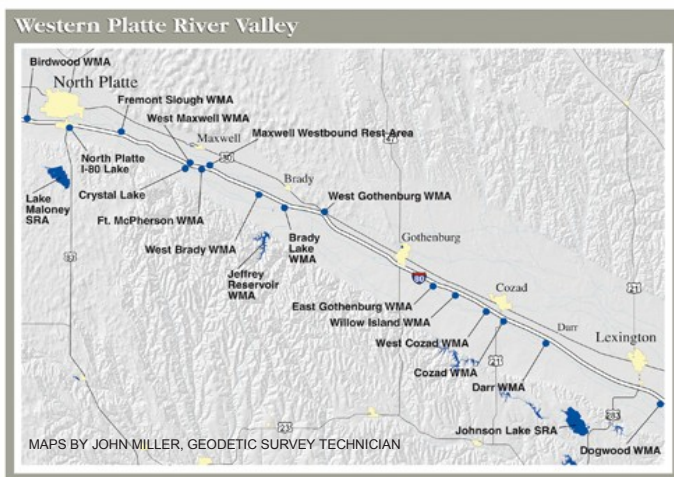


An online Google based map providing driving directions, aerial photographs, and basic information about all of Nebraska's public fishing lakes can be found here:

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/Fishing/PublicWaters/PublicWatersMap.aspx>

Besides the lakes located along Interstate 80 in South Central Nebraska, numerous other public water bodies can be found in close proximity of Interstate 80 as it crosses Nebraska. The publication entitled *Fishing Across Nebraska* highlights many of these areas. The publication can be accessed on-line at:

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/nebland/articles/fishing/I-80.pdf>



For additional information about fisheries management on the Interstate Lakes, please contact the NGPC Kearney office at 308-865-5310 or by email at the addresses listed below.

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